

BILLS PROMOTE HEALTHY FORESTS, RENEWABLE ENERGY, RURAL JOBS IN SOUTH DAKOTA

Herseth Sandlin, Bipartisan Coalition Introduce Legislation to Improve Forest and Energy Policy

Washington, DC- Today, Rep. Herseth Sandlin joined with a bipartisan coalition of her colleagues including Reps. Greg Walden (R-OR), Kurt Schrader (D-OR), Brian Baird (D-WA), and Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA.) to announce a bipartisan package of legislation that represents an innovative way forward in forest and energy policy. As part of the package, Rep. Herseth Sandlin introduced the Healthy Forests Restoration Amendments Act, common-sense legislation that will strengthen the existing tools available to federal forest managers to bring the most diseased and fire prone forests back to health. The other piece of legislation in the package is the Incentives to Increase Use of Renewable Biomass Act of 2009. This bill would establish a program at USDA to provide interest-free loans for converting existing equipment or installing new equipment to use renewable biomass for energy generation, heating, or cooling at an institution of higher education; a public or private elementary or secondary school; a hospital; a local government building; a governmental, community, or health building, and tribal buildings.

"The bills introduced today seek to reduce wild fire risk, incentivize sound forest management and the use of woody biomass as a source of renewable energy, and create jobs in rural communities in western South Dakota," Rep. Herseth Sandlin said. "These common sense policies will not only result in healthier forests and reduce wild fire risk, but complement efforts in the 2007 Energy Bill and jump start our nation's effort to become truly energy independent."

In 2003, Congress passed the bipartisan Healthy Forests Restoration Act, or “HFRA,” to enable managers of public lands to mitigate the risk posed by wildfire to local communities. This law represented a critical first step in updating federal forest management policy, but as the limitations of this law have revealed themselves over the past few years, it has become increasingly clear that HFRA needs to be improved.

By making important clarifications to existing law, the Healthy Forests Restoration Amendments Act will make certain that federal forest managers have the tools they need to proactively address the threat of wildfire, disease, and insect infestation to forests and the local communities that depend on them. This bill ensures land managers can use expedited HFRA procedures to protect infrastructure in rural communities from the threat of wildfire and to address infestation of disease or insects, such as the mountain pine beetle, through fuels reduction projects. It also improves efficiency by allowing land managers to conduct necessary connected actions such as weed management, tree planting, road work, and other important projects, when using the HFRA National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process for fuels reduction projects.

The bill also removes the arbitrary 20-million acre limitation included in HFRA, while protecting existing HFRA withdrawn areas and designated wilderness, so these tools can be utilized wherever they are needed. Finally, the bill improves HFRA procedures for fuels reduction in areas where a community wildfire protection plan is in place.

Rep. Herseth Sandlin added, "Written in the same bipartisan spirit as the original HFRA law, the bill I have introduced today takes another important step towards improving the management of

federal forests and halting the growing crisis in our forests and forest communities. It is my hope that the House will act quickly to approve this legislation."

Rep. Herseth Sandlin will also introduce a third bill that would improve the Production Tax Credit, including by extending the credit for open and closed loop biomass for five years and providing rate parity with other renewable energy sources such as wind and solar. Rep. Herseth noted her previous work on legislation to broaden the definition of renewable biomass in the 2007 Energy Bill. She added, "Renewable biomass from our forests has tremendous potential to contribute to our country's efforts to move toward energy independence. Since 2008, I have worked to broaden the definition of cellulosic ethanol under the new Renewable Fuel Standard to include woody biomass gathered from national forests, including the Black Hills National Forest. These three bills build on those efforts."

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